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Russian Hegemony and Non-Russian Insecurity: Foreign Policy Dilemmas of the USSR's Successor States

Alexander J. Motyl

Inasmuch as foreign policy is the prerogative only of states, it is fundamentally misleading to speak of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union except in the past tense. One can speak of the foreign *relations* of self-styled Union officials such as Mikhail Gorbachev, of the potential foreign policies of the successor states, or of the possibility of a new union with its own foreign policy. Non-states, such as the USSR, however, by definition cannot and do not have foreign policies. This simple conceptual distinction is critical, as it gets to the heart of the matter confronting Moscow and the republics: What kind of foreign policies will the Soviet Union's successor states pursue?

The End of the Soviet State

That the Soviet Union has ceased to exist is a proposition that some would still dispute. Notwithstanding the fact that all fifteen Union republics declared sovereignty in 1989-1990, that thirteen — minus Russia and Kazakhstan — proclaimed independence in the aftermath of the August coup, and that the Baltic states have actually separated, Western countries, together with Gorbachev and his entourage, continue to insist that the Soviet state still is. Of course, as even a superficial glance at Soviet

institutions reveals, nothing could be further from the truth. The formerly Soviet bureaucracy has split along republican lines, as have the secret police, the KGB, the regular police, the MVD, and, increasingly, the army. Republican parliaments and governments are not only behaving as if they were independent, but they are also assiduously introducing legislation that cements their new status. Republican economies are ineluctably coming under the control of local administrators and entrepreneurs, taxes are being collected in and retained by the republics, and republican elites are actively pursuing economic relations with non-Soviet countries. Perhaps most important is that the center has lost control over its own borders, while republican leaders are establishing formal diplomatic ties with other states. In a word, the government centered on Gorbachev is completely incapable of exercising authority beyond the walls of the Kremlin and, as such, no longer is a government.

Why, then, do Gorbachev and Western governments pretend otherwise? Gorbachev's position is easy to understand: the continued existence of some kind of Soviet government, even if representative only of himself, is the precondition of his own political survival. Unfortunately, Gorbachev's longstanding inability to distinguish between his



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own interests and those of his country is driving him to develop hopeless schemes of what might be termed "union renewal," thereby wasting valuable time and resources on fruitless debates, raising the specter of a resurgent Russian empire, and, not surprisingly, undermining non-Russian trust in cooperative ventures. In this sense, the continued existence of a Soviet center is one of the major obstacles to genuine inter-republic cooperation. As long as the center aspires to reestablish something of its former position, non-Russians will always suspect it of bad faith and accuse it of promoting economic union as a smokescreen for reestablishing political control.

The West's position is not so simple, as its insistence on the desirability of a union goes far beyond the understandable expedient of continuing negotiations over nuclear disarmament and troop withdrawals with only one interlocutor. As past treaties were signed with an entity called the Soviet Union, it is not unreasonable that some continuity be preserved and that present and future treaties be signed with that same entity, or its recognizable successor state. Ironically, the implications of such logic are not encouraging for the desperate Gorbachev. Because the rationale for retaining a Soviet partner rests on the necessity of completing still unfinished security business, once Soviet troops leave Germany and Poland and once the nuclear issue diminishes in importance, there will be virtually nothing for Gorbachev to do and no persuasive reason for Western states to maintain the charade—a fact that, incidentally, may incline the mercurial Gorbachev to truculence on East-West issues just as they approach resolution and, thus, presage his final demise.

Negotiating preferences aside, the West's argument for resurrecting a union tends to follow strictly economic lines. According to the conventional wisdom, it is best for the world, the West, and of course the republics that they combine in an economic and, better still, a political association. After all, integration, not disintegration, is the wave of the future, is it not? Alas, the argument is both spurious and unpersuasive.

It is spurious because Western policy makers do not insist that newly independent Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary would be better off in an economic or political

union with Russia and the other republics, although the supposed logic of economic association in post-communist conditions suggests that this is exactly what they should say. After all, their economies are as critically connected to that of the former Soviet Union as those of the non-Russian republics are to that of Russia; their inability to compete on the world market is no smaller than that of most of the republics; and the presumed advantages of a common economic space should certainly be no fewer for them than for the non-Russian republics. If Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic states can be the targets of Western reform programs that take their independence as a given, then so, too, can the republics, which are independent de facto, if not de jure. Such a double standard suggests that the West's preference for a unified Soviet economic space stems less from a dispassionate concern for genuine economic reform and far more from worry about its own interests—specifically, the Soviet Union's \$80 billion debt, which truly independent republics might be inclined to repudiate as part of their unwanted totalitarian past. And, as Western countries surely must appreciate, at least morally the republics would be perfectly justified in rejecting the unwanted legacy of a regime that brutally imposed itself on them, destroyed their environments, decimated their populations, and devastated their economies in a fashion that can only be termed genocidal. Of course, the West should also appreciate that financially desperate republics, while hardly likely to repudiate debts if such behavior would alienate potential donors and lenders, are also in no position to pay back the enormous sums involved.

The Impossibility of Economic Union

More important perhaps, the argument for economic association is unpersuasive because it is unrealistic, inasmuch as the chances of an economic union's emerging anytime soon are virtually nil—not only because the very logic of economic and political reform militates against such an endeavor, but also because Ukraine, the linchpin of any such union, is most unlikely to join.¹ The case for an economic union is unrealistic because it ignores two points: that the destruction of the Soviet state oc-

1 Chrystia Freeland, "Ukraine initials economic treaty," *The Financial Times*, 7 November 1991.

curred in a manner that precludes any kind of re-centralization, and that non-Russians, like people everywhere, are rational.

Regardless of Gorbachev's intentions, which were aimed at streamlining the Soviet system, the actual effect of his policies was quite the opposite. Gorbachev destroyed the system, and he did so by fatally weakening the Communist Party, which had always acted as the core of the system, by failing to replace it with a meaningful institutional substitute. Furthermore, Gorbachev succeeded in undermining whatever loyalty to and faith in the Soviet Union that people may have had, while doing virtually nothing to reform the economy. It is, thus, not the republics that created the chaos, but Gorbachev himself.²

As the political and economic systems unravelled, and as people's awareness of the criminal nature of the historic Soviet state hit home, not only did they experience a revulsion no different from that which Jews feel toward Nazism,³ but they also realized that the policies of the center had thoroughly disrupted their lives, that the center was unlikely to make amends, and that they were quite literally on their own. It was therefore Gorbachev who pushed the republics toward sovereignty; and it was the coup of August 1991, which was conclusive proof of the incompetence and malevolence of central institutions, that pushed them toward independence.

The reality of the post-Soviet republics is, as a result, marked by three inescapable facts. First and foremost, all-Union economic and political institutions are chaotic at best and non-existent at worst. Second, there is complete and total mistrust of the center. And third, republican institutions and elites have emerged and consolidated. Lest wishful thinking substitute for rigorous analysis, these constraints must, for better or for worse, be taken into account in any serious discussion of economic and political reform.

The central implication of these factors is that union-wide economic associations and union-wide economic reforms cannot work. First and foremost, because the economy is in shambles, to insist on the

greater economic rationality of larger, common economic spaces — inasmuch as they facilitate coordination and permit economies of scale, among other things — is to impose economic categories, which may make great sense in a functioning economic setting, such as that of Western Europe, onto the economic equivalent of a Hobbesian state of nature.⁴ The time to have spoken of joint policies and common spaces was several years ago, *before* Gorbachev pushed the Soviet economy into oblivion. Not only is there no common economic space in the former Soviet Union, but the developmental disparities among republics are so enormous — consider for instance the needs of Belarus versus those of Kyrgyzstan — that it is hard to imagine how, despite the declared intention of some republics to do just that, such a space might actually be created.

Ongoing debates over broadening or deepening the European Economic Community are instructive for purposes of comparison. Notwithstanding the political rationale for bringing in the East Europeans, it is unquestionably true that the vast differences between the economies of, say, Poland and France immeasurably complicate, if not make impossible, genuine economic integration. By the same token, some West Europeans persuasively argue that the economic policies of individual EEC members must first be brought into line before genuine unification, lest the irresponsibility of one country affect negatively the economies of the others. If even the far more developed West is concerned over the possible repercussions of premature unification, the case for a common Soviet economic space appears nearly hopeless.

Consider in this light the experience of Poland and Hungary. Had they remained bound to some coordinating economic mechanism in Moscow, it would have been impossible for them to have embarked on radical economic reform — partly because their own thinking was so far ahead of that of the Kremlin, but mostly because the idea of authoritatively coordinating the malfunctioning economies of disparate sovereign states is a contradiction in terms and, thus, a guarantee of immobility. Successful coordination could ensue only if the center

2 I develop this argument in greater detail in "Totalitarian Collapse, Imperial Disintegration, and the Rise of the Soviet West," in Michael Mandelbaum, ed., *The Rise of Nations in the Soviet Union* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1991), pp. 44-63; "Empire or Stability? The Case for Soviet Dissolution," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 499-524.

3 The comparison with Jewish attitudes toward Nazism obviously rests on the view that the Soviet leadership is guilty of crimes against humanity no different from those perpetrated by Hitler.

4 For an example of this kind of thinking, see "Stabilization, liberalization, and devolution: Assessment of the economic situation and reform process in the Soviet Union," *European Economy*, no. 45 (December 1990).

were endowed with supreme authority and therefore were able to coerce constituent units to submit to painful policies. In other words, under post-Soviet conditions, a coordinating economic mechanism, if it were to be genuinely effective, would have to be the sole repository of sovereignty as well — a requirement that is not only impossible to fulfill but is also unacceptable to the *sovereign* republics.

But there is an additional problem. Even if we assume that the case for economic integration is strong, under the peculiarly post-totalitarian, post-Soviet conditions bequeathed to the republics by Gorbachev, integration would actually guarantee the failure of radical economic reform. After all, the economic and political overhaul that Western economists recommend can succeed only if there are vast resources — of a coercive, material, and normative kind — available to induce and/or compel individuals to comply, which is another way of saying that revolution is a terribly expensive enterprise.⁵

Coercion is not an option, both because of the West's insistence that human rights not be violated and, as the failed coup proved, because it could not be applied effectively anyway. Material resources are minimal in a collapsing economic environment and, despite the grandest hopes of the Grand Bargaineers, there seems little chance that the vast sums that reform would require — at least 15 times as much per year as Bonn is investing annually in eastern Germany! — will be forthcoming from the West.⁶ Certainly the current incapacity of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, which the West claims to favor, to break through to Western markets and acquire more than token assistance bodes poorly for the former Soviet Union.

All that is left, then, is normative resources — appeals to legitimacy, patriotism, and the like. These do exist in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, because each of these countries can claim to be pursuing a national revival, an anti-imperial cause, and an anti-Communist struggle. Although their institutions are not much stronger than those of most of the republics, and although their economies are equally decrepit, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary can countenance and even embark on radical reform only because their governments possess reserves of legitimacy that permit them to encourage citizens to submit to economic ordeals

voluntarily. And, as Poland's current difficulties with pushing through radical reform suggests, even legitimacy may not be enough.

But if there is any legitimacy in the former Soviet Union, it is to be found only *within* the republics. Like Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and other republics represent promising experiments in national independence, cultural revival, and democratic transitions. Nothing of the sort can be said of what remains of the Gorbachev state: its institutions are tainted with the failure of perestroika and the historical criminality of the Soviet Union, and its president is widely believed to be nothing more than the caretaker of the Kremlin, and an arrogant and incompetent one at that. Consequently, if there is to be any hope of economic reform in the former Soviet Union, then it can be only in the individual republics, and not in some union entity.

My final point along these lines concerns the emergence of republican elites. Not only is it not in their personal political interest to give up their newly acquired powers, but the fledgling democracies over which many now reside will actually prevent them from doing so. Inasmuch as their own still shaky legitimacy is so deeply rooted in national revival, and inasmuch as their authority is a function of their ability to prevent the disintegration of republican economies, it is unrealistic to expect them to commit political suicide by giving up their prerogatives to some nebulous and illegitimate center. Such a feeling may be bad or it may be good, but it should not surprise us in light of the universal tendency of national elites, however strong or weak, to behave in this manner.

Moreover, the consolidation of democracy would actually prevent them from embarking on such a step, even if they so desired. Democratic politics are popular politics, and if "the people" reject economic subordination to a center they perceive, rightly or wrongly, as imperial and/or Russian, then there is little that democratic politicians — especially weak ones in weak democracies — can do. If the people perceive other republics as being parasitical, as buying up their scarce goods and flooding their market with worthless rubles, then, once again, there is little that genuinely democratic politicians can do. Those policy makers who maneuver and manipulate public opinion successfully

⁵ See Alexander J. Motyl, "Reform or Revolution in Central Europe?" in Erhard Busek et. al., eds., *The Future of Central Europe*, forthcoming.

⁶ This rough, though possibly conservative, estimate is based on the ratio of the Soviet population to that of the former GDR.

do so in relatively ambiguous situations that permit a multiplicity of interpretations. In the former Soviet Union, however, economic chaos is an undeniable fact of life.

If we therefore exclude the possibility of the West's investing in the former USSR even a fraction of the resources that western Germany has poured, and will continue to pour, into its eastern *Bundeslaender*, then the only way that economic — and even more so political — union could be imposed on the post-Soviet republics is by force. Were Boris Yeltsin, perhaps in alliance with Gorbachev, to attempt to establish an authoritarian regime, were he to whip up Russian public opinion against the republics, were he to mobilize the army against the republics in a fashion reminiscent of Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia, then and only then might the republics have to succumb to the reestablishment of some kind of centralized union authority.

But could such a maneuver, however hypothetical, succeed? For better or for worse, the answer seems to be no. Just as the coup leaders failed to reimpose control in August 1991, so, too, Russia would be unable to extend its control militarily to the post-Soviet republics. As noted above, the army and police are cracking, the economy is falling apart, and resentment of Russia is high. Circumstances are most unpropitious for foreign policy adventures of the kind that massive military intervention would require. No less important, the republics would fight back, and it is not at all clear that Russia could win this time, as it did in 1918-1922. The balance of resources — economic potential, population, and armed forces — is much too even today for a Russian-non-Russian civil war to end favorably for Russia. And whatever the outcome, of course, civil war would spell the doom of any kind of economic cooperation and economic reform.⁷

The Ukrainian Linchpin

It is within this context that Ukraine's unwillingness to join a renewed union has to be seen. As most commentators correctly observe, Gorbachev's

stated preference for a creeping political union masquerading as an economic association is not an option for Ukraine. Contemporary Ukrainian political discourse is so supportive of sovereignty and so mistrustful of a junior partnership with the "older brother" that any association involving the creation of authoritative central institutions with the power to override Ukrainian ones is simply impossible. In this respect, no genuinely democratic or career-minded Ukrainian leader can embark on a move that threatens to alienate the vast majority of Ukraine's population.

No less important than the political dimension, however, is that Ukrainians, like other non-Russians, are not the irrational children that Western journalists and economists often imply they are.⁸ They do not lack "common sense." Quite the contrary, they fully appreciate that continued economic relations with all the republics are not only desirable, but also unavoidable. It is, as a result, simply preposterous to imagine that they, or the other non-Russians, desire autarky.⁹ What Ukrainians, Balts, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians understand, however, is that transitions to markets, while necessitating inter-state economic cooperation, inevitably occur within the boundaries of their countries, as that is where the people and institutions that must change reside. Radical reforms affect millions of people and, as such, must be conducted with some sensitivity for the social needs and political expectations of the citizenry. Thus, what may be ideal in the world of an economist, may be nonsense in the world of the practical democratic policy maker.¹⁰ Like the Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians, who are quite serious about reform, so, too, the Ukrainians understand that tying their economies to the dead weight of collapsed central institutions simply makes no sense and, if anything, is a guarantee of the failure of economic reform.

Without Ukraine, however, an economic union of Russia and the Central Asians is destined to collapse in short order for at least two reasons. First, Russian attitudes toward the Muslim peoples have traditionally been racist, while those of the Central Asians toward the Russians are rooted in cultural

7 See Alexander J. Motyl, "From Imperial Decline to Imperial Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Empire in Comparative Perspective," in Richard Rudolph and David Good, eds., *Nationalism and Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992).

8 Non-Russians, for instance, are invariably said to "squabble," never to negotiate. Their national feelings are always menacing, ours, magically, are not.

9 I make this point only because Western economists generally ascribe to all the republics a desire for self-sufficiency. I know of no respectable republican leader who has made such a claim. With whom, then, are Western economists talking?

10 Consider, for instance, the dilemmas discussed in Cheryl Payer, *The Debt Trap* (New York: Monthly Review, 1974).

resentment. Second, and more important, however, is the vast economic disparity between Russia, which is a poor though relatively developed country, and Central Asia, which is an underdeveloped Third World region. Not only can Russia no longer afford to subsidize Central Asia, but the introduction of genuine market conditions means that such subsidies would necessarily cease, thereby alienating the Central Asians, and that Central Asian labor migration to Russia would probably increase, thereby straining Russian resources and inciting ethnic conflict.

The Soviet Union, then, truly is no more, and there is no chance that anything resembling such a union will be resurrected. As Anders Aslund puts it, "Forget the Soviet 'Union'."¹¹ And, I would add, "Forget its foreign policy." If this argument is valid, then the only foreign policies worth speaking about are those of the individual republics. It is to this issue that I now turn.

Foreign Policy Trends

Although it is impossible to predict exactly what the foreign policy of any particular republic will be, it is possible to identify three general issues that will preoccupy all non-Russian states — relations with the world, relations with their immediate neighbors, and relations with Russia. As I argue below, it is the third issue — the Russian problem — that will overshadow and largely determine the course of the other two.

We may expect all the republics to embark on what I call *internationalization*. Sooner or later, all will seek to establish diplomatic relations with other states in general, and with those in the West in particular. By the same token, the republics will expect to join international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Unavoidably, the countries of the world will have to choose — between fifteen potential states and the custodian of the Kremlin.

Ukraine and Belarus, which have been full members of the United Nations since 1945, will have particular advantages in the quest for international status, even in comparison to the already inde-

pendent Balts. The two Slavic nations possess a full-fledged diplomatic corps, they have international experience, are members of all United Nations affiliates, and are signatories to a variety of international treaties. Their anomalous position — after all, they are and, as incipient states, should be UN members (while the Soviet Union, should not, but is, and Russia, which should, but is not) — will prove to be a bone of contention for the immediate future, as Ukraine and Belarus utilize the United Nations platform to make demands that the international community treat them with the seriousness they deserve.¹²

Rather more perplexing for the world is that the so-called Soviet Union will insist on playing an important role in international deliberations without actual having any reason or rationale, besides inertia, for doing so. Soviet membership on the Security Council will be especially problematic, while Soviet meddling in international conferences will only complicate, if not undermine, already difficult processes. Not surprisingly, the Soviet presence in international fora will be most inconvenient for Russia. To be sure, inasmuch as Russian interests increasingly dovetail with central Soviet interests *internally*, maintaining a semblance of a Soviet Union may enhance Russian hopes of retaining control over the fractious borderlands. But that very same Soviet center, however useful as an internal fig-leaf, is an obstacle *externally*, where the state of Russia, and not the person of Gorbachev, deserves to be represented and its interests defended. Sooner or later, Russia will have to confront this problem. More likely than not, it will have to abandon the Soviet pretense externally, and resort to straightforward power politics, without the pretense of all-union interests, internally.

The republics' full entry into the international arena will be greatly facilitated by their pursuit of *regionalization* — the second foreign policy issue referred to above. As independent entities with particular geographic locations and cultural inclinations, the republics will drift toward their more "natural" partners — geographically adjacent countries with similar cultural and/or linguistic characteristics. The Baltic states will gravitate toward Scandinavia and Germany; Belarus and

11 Anders Aslund, "Forget the Soviet 'Union'," *The New York Times*, 8 November 1991.

12 Based in part on remarks by Belorussian Foreign Minister Piotr Krauchanko, 2 November 1990, at a presentation to the Harriman Institute on Belorussian foreign policy. Both Belarus and Ukraine have undertaken intensive campaigns to internationalize the question of relief to the victims of Chernobyl, on the argument that the Soviet government is not competent to deal with the issue. See also Alexander J. Motyl, "The Foreign Relations of the Ukrainian SSR," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 6 (March 1982), pp. 62-78.

Ukraine will tend toward Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary; Moldova will join Romania; Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan will rejoin Asia; Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan will become part of the Middle East. The only republic with no place to go will be Russia: it will remain on its own, a condition that, historically at least, is not at all anomalous.

The Russian Problem

Unfortunately but unavoidably, Russia's isolation will serve only to enhance its fearsome presence and, thus, to reinforce non-Russian mistrust of Moscow — the third fact of life that the republics will have to confront. Even if parts, such as Bashkiria or Tataria, eventually break away, Russia will remain an enormous country — with a population of some 150 million, vast resources, a huge and humiliated army, and a large, if inefficient industrial base. Regardless of who rules Russia, therefore, the country will inevitably represent a potential hegemon to all its neighbors, a possible threat to their existence, and, thus, their paramount security concern. Unwittingly perhaps, Andranik Migranyan has recently lent support to this proposition:

When all is said and done, Russia today remains the only great power, in military-political and economic terms, in the entire vast expanse of Eurasia. As a natural consequence, the functions of stabilizing that expanse fall to it. No matter what unpleasant associations and fears such functions may call forth, it is important to realize that great powers objectively carry a burden of their own. It doesn't enter anyone's head to question the role of the US in ensuring stability in such regions as Central America or the Middle East.¹³

Several additional factors complicate the picture. First, Russian self-identity traditionally has been imperial, tending to deny the legitimacy and autonomy of the non-Russian peoples and, thus, unintentionally promoting mistrust of Russian intentions. Second, the millions of Russians living in the republics may develop divided loyalties — especially if intellectuals such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn continue to insist on border realignments¹⁴ — which non-Russians may, in turn, perceive as fifth-column inclinations. And third, Russia will be far

more prone to lapse into authoritarianism than the Balts, the Belarusians, Ukrainians, and the Central Asians. Not only do Russians, like all the others, lack a democratic political culture, but the vast size of the country, its grossly uneven development, its politicized ethnic heterogeneity (Checheno-Ingushetia may be indicative of things to come), the difficulty of creating a nonimperial Russian allegiance to a state of their own, and the strong possibility that the West will be inclined, for the sake of an illusory stability, to tolerate a Russian authoritarianism — will all tend to obstruct the establishment of effective and legitimate democratic institutions in Russia. And if Russia turns non-democratic, then the threat it represents to other states will only be magnified.

Further complicating the issue for the non-Russians is the fact that Russia's most likely foreign policy will not alleviate their security concerns. Unlike the non-Russian republics, which will gravitate toward their geographic and cultural neighbors, Russia will remain alone and, thus, may desire to escape non-Russian "encirclement" by establishing close relations with countries that share its own overarching strategic and, perhaps, economic interests in Eurasia. Historically Russia's natural partner — as well as competitor — in Eastern and Central Europe has been Germany: the partitions of Poland, the post-Rapallo rapprochement, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact suggest that the two countries share a geostrategic interest that transcends particular leaders and particular regimes. Although the temptation to form such a condominium will be great, it is questionable whether a Germany understandably concerned about its image would actually succumb to it, and thereby reawaken fears of German domination in both Eastern and Western Europe.

To whom then is Russia likely to turn? Great Britain, France, and Japan are possible partners, of course, but most likely, perhaps even more likely than a turn toward Germany, is a continuation of the current Soviet-American partnership, but in a Russian-American guise. The alliance makes sense, not only because it builds on what Presidents Gorbachev and Bush have already achieved and because it necessitates no major realignment, but also because it promises Russia the allegiance of the world's only military superpower in a region where

13 *Moskovskiy Novosti*, 6 October 1991, as translated by *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, Vol. XLIII, No. 39, 30 October 1991, pp. 4-5.

14 A. Solzhenitsyn, "Obrashcheniye k referendumu 1 dekabriya 1991 g.," *Russkaya mysl*, 1991.

the United States has historically been inclined to support Russian hegemony. For the United States as well such a partnership would be an attractive way of "rolling back" independence by pursuing an imperial new world order policed by the two largest countries of the world.

Regardless of whomever Russia finds as its partner, however, non-Russian insecurity will only be increased. And it is of course the fully sober republican appreciation of Russia's hegemonic potential — an appreciation enhanced by the Yeltsin government's claims on the Russian-populated regions of Ukraine and Kazakhstan — that is pushing them to develop security capabilities of their own. Inasmuch as Russia will inherit the lion's share of the Soviet military, armaments, and nuclear weapons, the potential threat to non-Russian security is very real indeed. Not surprisingly, nervous republics are beginning to form their own national guards and armies, while Ukraine and Kazakhstan have expressed an unwillingness to transfer the nuclear weapons located on their territories to Russia — policies that, not coincidentally, are fully reminiscent of Western behavior vis-a-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Republican actions, although inconvenient for a West desirous of rapid arms control, are, alas, quite rational.¹⁵ Given Russia's size and strength, given Gorbachev's rejection of non-Russian independence, and given Yeltsin's ambiguous attitude toward existing borders, it makes perfect sense for Kiev and Alma-Ata to retain nuclear warheads — as a possible deterrent in case of armed Russian aggression, as a means of internationalizing their plight, and, most important, as a bargaining chip intended to secure their sovereignty and borders. Nuclear weapons have become a ticket to security and statehood, not because republican elites are so obtuse as to countenance a nuclear Armageddon — surely, Chernobyl has sensitized the Ukrainians and Belorussians to the undesirability of atomic war — but because they want to survive in the face of a menacing Russia and an unsympathetic West.¹⁶

Besides pursuing specific security policies, the republics will hope to find refuge from Russia within the international community. All will also seek to establish regional alliances as a form of

bandwagoning. A Ukrainian-Belarusian-Polish alliance is especially likely; a Turkestani self-defense region associated with China is not inconceivable; nor, finally, is an Armenian rapprochement with Azerbaijan and Turkey. Most important, however, all will seek powerful patrons — in Western Europe, Japan, or North America. Whether or not they will succeed in this endeavor is hard to say. Japan, Germany, and the United States may have an interest in developing some republics economically, but they will be reluctant to extend their protection politically and militarily for fear of annoying a Russia friendly to the West. Only if Russia proves to be menacing would supporting some key republics, such as Ukraine, and transforming them into clients of Western Europe or the United States make geopolitical sense.

Sooner or later, therefore, the non-Russian republics may come face to face with a savage dilemma. If Russia behaves amicably toward the West, the republics will have to cope with Moscow's relentless pressure on their own and the imperative of survival may incline them to "reckless" behavior. If, on the other hand, Russia proves threatening to the West — surely a condition that bodes well for nobody — then the non-Russian republics may come to enjoy some Western support, but under unenviable geopolitical conditions. Such uncertainty cannot, I submit, be conducive to the pacific resolution of the security requirements of the post-Soviet states — and of Europe — and removing this uncertainty must be the top priority of Western policy makers.

The Potential for Conflict

Although it was difficult to predict what the foreign policies of the republics will be, one can say with some confidence that, under current conditions of certain Russian hegemony and equally certain non-Russian insecurity, Russia's relationship with the republics will be exceedingly strained. As the following survey of international relations theories shows, very different theories lead to surprisingly similar — if depressing — results.

Realist theories suggest that inter-state conflict is inevitable by virtue of the fact that states exist in an

15 For a somewhat different view of republican rationality, see Jack Matlock, "The Politics of Russian Economic Reform," *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 1991.

16 Prime Minister John Major's recent statement, "It makes no sense economically and no sense politically for the republics to build up their own forces," is typical of the complete Western misreading of the republics' security dilemma. See *The New York Times*, 9 November 1991.

anarchic international environment, which impels them to search for security even at the risk of war.¹⁷ Conflict is least likely when hegemony, as during the Cold War, maintain the peace in their own sphere of influence and eschew direct engagement with the opposing hegemon. Realism clearly implies that the end of the Cold War will raise the likelihood of conflict in both Eastern and Western Europe, as new and old states suddenly confront massive uncertainties and address security dilemmas that push them to form alliances, engage in aggressive action, and perhaps even countenance war. From this perspective, that Russia will remain a regional giant would appear to be stabilizing, were it not for the fact that its size will be directly proportional to its weakness. Russia will therefore be unable to play the role of a genuine hegemon, but, in trying to do so unsuccessfully, it is likely to enhance non-Russian insecurity and, thus, to provoke unnecessary conflicts. Western support of a pitiable Russian giant would only worsen relations between Russia and the other successor states, which would resent such intrusiveness and seek succor from regional neighbors or anti-Western states.

Institutional theories, which stress the importance of international norms and institutions in reducing conflict, are not, alas, much more optimistic.¹⁸ On the one hand, few established norms for regulating inter-state relations exist within Eastern Europe for the simple reason that the post-Soviet states are so new. On the other hand, if current attitudes are indicative of future trends, the international community will do next to nothing to integrate these states. To be sure, we may expect the post-Soviet states to become members of the CSCE, but only because of its largely symbolic character. In contrast, the far more significant discussion surrounding the deepening or broadening of the EEC suggests that the East Europeans and the republics will remain outside "Europe" for a long time to come. But *now* is precisely when institutional norms and institutional membership might make an important difference.

A third group of theories argue that the *internal politics* of states determine their foreign policy behavior. Some scholars focus on the perceptions and

misperceptions of policy makers; others emphasize the nature of the regime; some point to prevailing foreign policy myths or ideologies; still others discuss the impact of political coalitions on the foreign policy process.¹⁹ Here, too, however, we find few grounds for comfort. Correct perceptions require information, experience, and the willingness and ability to learn from past mistakes. After many decades of totalitarianism, it is no surprise that the information available to East European and post-Soviet leaders is often deeply flawed, that their foreign policy elites are by and large young and inexperienced in the ways of diplomacy, and that their ability to learn has not yet been put to the test.

Moreover, even if it is true, as some argue, that democracies never fight each other, then the fact that few of the post-Communist states are established democracies, and are not likely to become such soon, is certainly cause for concern.²⁰ Indeed, Western insistence that these states adopt economic shock therapy, which perforce will be both disruptive and destabilizing, may confront their fragile democracies with the impossible task of coping simultaneously with reform and with the overwhelming political and social pressures it generates. Under conditions such as these, it is not inconceivable that democracy may be discredited and popular preference be given to "strong men," with or without axes.

Myths and ideologies that might propel leaders to adopt aggressive policies are no less problematic in the East European setting. The post-Soviet republics, like Poland and Hungary, are self-consciously national states with an assumed responsibility for their co-nationals in neighboring countries. While such concern can be laudable, it can also lead to meddling in the affairs of other states and, even, to claims on adjacent territories. Border disputes have already emerged, and while they may or may not intensify, they are likely to remain on the agenda as long as most of these states employ national identity to legitimize themselves. More worrisome than such national ideologies is that a variety of East European states have imperial and/or chauvinist traditions: Russia stands out, of course, but Poland and Hungary may not be far behind.

17 See Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

18 See Stephen Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

19 Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

20 Michael Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 80 (December 1986), pp. 1151-1169.

The final perspective, which focuses on the pressure that internal interest groups may exert on decision making, leaves us with the most optimistic (sic) conclusions. Inasmuch as the non-Russian republics lack established military and industrial establishments, and inasmuch as bona fide civil societies, which are the carriers of interest groups, are still mostly absent in these countries, there are at present few groups with a direct interest in fanning aggression and conflict. Naturally, as these countries become "normal," such forces will begin to emerge and may then come to exert a nefarious influence on foreign policy. Worse still, the one country that has powerful pressure groups is Russia, which will inherit most of the Soviet military-industrial complex, and it is only Russia that is capable or possibly inclined to play a hegemonic role in the region anyway.

In sum, no theory leads to unabashedly optimistic expectations. Quite the contrary, all suggest that inter-state tensions, perhaps even conflicts, will be inevitable. And if and when such conflicts emerge, the potential for their developing into an East European version of Yugoslavia should not be dismissed. In other words, the West, if genuinely concerned with its own security, if not that of the East, may soon be facing a terrible problem the resolution of which will require exceedingly bold and creative thinking — just the kind that has been so sorely lacking in Western Europe's attempts to resolve the Yugoslav crisis.

Stability or Chaos?

What, then, might the West do? It is false to suggest that Western states can only sit by and watch as the post-Soviet states resolve their own problems — both because the West has already intervened on the side of the center and because there are things that can be done to affect the course of inter-state developments in general and post-Soviet developments in particular. Affecting international processes is what diplomacy is, after all, about.²¹

As I have argued in this essay, current Western policy toward the former Soviet Union — as recently manifested at the Group of Seven meeting in Bangkok and the November 1991 NATO gathering in Rome — is both irrational and self-defeating, as it is premised on maintaining relations with and strengthening an entity, the Soviet state, that no longer exists and that cannot be revived.²² Needless to say, such a policy course is doomed to failure. Moreover, the longer the West insists on dealing with a fictitious state and ignoring the reality of republican independence, the greater the likelihood that genuine economic and political reform will not occur, that inter-republic relations will remain dangerously undefined, and that massive instability and continued economic misery will result.

For the former Soviet Union not to descend into massive turmoil and strife, it is therefore imperative that the West begin at the beginning and accept the new reality: the existence and unavoidability of independent republics, which cannot and therefore should not be rolled back.²³ In other words, it is imperative that the West abandon the fiction of the Gorbachev state immediately and recognize the independence of all republics as they are currently constituted. That is, not only should republican statehood be recognized, but the existing boundaries of republican states should be left intact. Without both conditions — independence and stable borders — the non-Russian republics' first concern will remain survival and the situation in the former USSR will remain tense, uncertain, and unstable for the foreseeable future.

Once this step is taken, then — and only then — can policies be adopted to help channel republican foreign policies in the desired direction: in the former USSR, as in Western Europe, maximal security and minimal trust are the preconditions of cooperation. Thus, in arguing that, while remaining unrecognized, "the ex-Soviet republics should expect western help only if they play by the rules," the normally sober *Economist* misses the point completely.²⁴ The West can induce the republics to play by the rules only if the West recognizes them as

21 See Jack Snyder, "International Leverage on Soviet Domestic Change," *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (October 1989), pp. 1-30.

22 My definition of rationality is borrowed from David Hume, who argues that a "passion" is unreasonable if "founded on the supposition of the existence of objects which really do not exist" — such as, for instance, the Soviet Union. For an extended discussion of rationality, see Alexander J. Motyl, *Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality: Coming to Grips With Nationalism in the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 30-45. The quotation from Hume is on p. 33 of that volume.

23 Zbigniew Brzezinski argues in similar fashion. See "Conflicted on Europe," *The New York Times*, 10 November 1991.

24 *The Economist*, 19 October 1991.

independent and, thus, as qualified to play by international rules. By insisting on rule playing without addressing the republics' legitimate security concerns vis-a-vis Russia, the West is not only placing the republics into an impossible strategic position, but it is also actually encouraging them *not* to play by the rules! Unless the West provides minimal security guarantees by accepting the republics as they are constituted as worthy of independence, the republics will have no choice but to give priority to their immediate survival over the remote possibility of insignificant Western "help."

Only once their independence and borders are recognized and the republics become subjects of international law can inter-republic relations be addressed as an issue susceptible to the pressures and inducements of economic and political diplomacy. At that point, the countries of the West might consider the remedies suggested by international relations theories.

Thus, realism might recommend recognizing the threat that Russia implicitly poses to all the post-Communist states, inducing it to reduce its military-industrial capabilities drastically, and providing formal security guarantees to the non-Russian republics.

Institutionalism might suggest that the republics be incorporated into the United Nations and other genuinely important international and regional political and economic bodies, and that Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan be included in arms control negotiations as an inducement both to dispose of nuclear weapons and to avoid irresponsible behavior.

Theories of domestic influence might recommend defusing imperialist and nationalist ideologies by involving the republics in the Helsinki process; addressing the problem of misperceptions by sharing Western information with republican

leaders; reducing pressure group influence on foreign policy by inducing post-Soviet states to eschew large military establishments and defense industries in return for security guarantees; and promoting democracy by fostering cultural and educational exchanges, supporting private initiatives that contribute to the growth of civil society, and providing republican elites with opportunities to work in Western democratic institutions.

Naturally, none of these policies is cost-free. On the other hand, premised as they are on the incorporation of republics into existing international structures, most actually entail no immediate expenditure of resources. And because these structures already work, the cost of maintaining stability may therefore be quite low. In other words, a relatively stable Eastern Europe may be able to be achieved *if* the post-Soviet republics are granted the same status as the post-Communist states of Central Europe and *if* both sets of states are incorporated into stable European and international institutions. It is precisely the current high-risk Western policy — which obstructs the inevitable emergence of genuine states, enhances their fears of Russian domination, prevents the pursuit of potentially effective international policies, and, last but not least, by undercutting the possibility of economic reform forecloses the possibility of debt repayment — that threatens to bring about the scenario no one claims to desire: i.e., continued instability, continued lack of reform, the emergence of authoritarian options, the development of inter-ethnic and inter-state conflicts, which would herald the possible transformation of the post-Soviet republics into a monstrous version of Yugoslavia.

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